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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study investigated the nature of classroom management practices and teacher thinking about these practices in five kindergartens during the first month of school. Participants (two novice second-year teachers and three experienced teachers) were videotaped during four half-day sessions, beginning with the first day of school and once a week thereafter. Stimulated recall data were gathered in audiotaped interviews as teachers viewed videotapes of themselves. Clinical observations were gathered during and after tapings and interviews. Using these three data sources, a grounded theory analysis generated 55 categories of classroom management issues. Temporal patterns were analyzed. Using the constant comparative technique, eight hypotheses were developed concerning the importance of management over content, routinization, establishment of rules and control, individual behavior problems, discipline styles, first-day differences, and learning opportunities offered by the half-day schedule. Descriptions of similarities and differences between experienced and inexperienced teacher illustrate how they help children learn school behaviors and maintain order the first days of kindergarten. (17 references) (Author/MLH)

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The Beginning of the Beginning:
A Comparison of Classroom Management Practices
of Novice and Experienced Kindergarten Teachers
the First Month of School

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The Beginning of the Beginning: A Comparison of Classroom Management Practices of Novice and Experienced Kindergarten Teachers the First Month of School

Abstract

This descriptive study investigates the nature of classroom management practices and teacher thinking about these practices in five kindergartens the first month of school. Participants (two novice teachers in their second year of teaching and three experienced teachers with 15-20 years) were videotaped four half-day sessions beginning with the first day of school and once a week thereafter. Stimulated recall data were gathered in audiotaped interviews as teachers viewed the videotapes of themselves. Clinical observations were gathered during and after tapings and interviews. Using these three data sources, a grounded theory analysis generated 55 categories of classroom management issues. In addition temporal patterns of time and events were analyzed. Using the constant comparative technique, eight propositions or hypotheses were developed. Descriptions of the similarities as well as the differences between experienced and inexperienced teachers paint a rich picture of how teachers help children learn school behaviors and maintain order the first days of kindergarten--children's first introduction into the public school culture--the "beginning of the beginning."

There is a need for more in-depth studies of how teachers effectively initiate, direct and monitor instruction. Doyle (1986) suggests the need for a closer look at the processes of monitoring, pacing, directing, routinizing and intervention within classrooms. The closer look "would provide a rich picture of how classroom order is achieved and would enlarge the knowledge base of interpreting classroom events and improving strategies for sustaining order in these complex environments" (p. 424). He emphasizes that the examination of management processes needs to be context sensitive, particularly with reference to the time of year.

Indeed, there is a lack of data on effective classroom management during the critical days at the beginning of the school year. Intuition suggests that the ways in which teachers behave and structure the first sessions of the year affect their classroom management throughout the year. Evidence suggests that the establishment and management of initial routines and instructional procedures are important to classroom management in secondary and elementary classrooms (Brooks, 1984; Emmer, Evertson, & Anderson, 1980; Evertson & Emmer, 1982; Moskowitz & Hayman, 1976).

Traditionally, studies of classroom management in the elementary school relied on narratives of classroom events recorded by trained observers in first grade and above. Only a few studies reported gathering data through videotaping, teacher interviews and/or stimulated recalls (Fogarty, Wang, & Creek 1983; Leinhardt, 1983; Ropo, 1987; Westerman, 1990). However, no studies of this type have been reported at the kindergarten level. An analysis of early sessions at the kindergarten level would provide pertinent knowledge of how teachers help children learn school behaviors and maintain order at the ***beginning of the beginning***--the first days of kindergarten--children's first introduction into the public school culture.

Novice-Expert Research

In addition to in-depth studies of teachers, there is much to be learned from the study of differences and similarities between experienced and novice teachers. Expert vs novice teacher research is critical if we are to develop a body of knowledge to improve teacher education programs (Borko & Livingston, 1989).

To date we have evidence that (a) experts have more well developed schemata (presumably constructed through experiences) from which to make decisions than novices (Leinhardt & Greeno, 1986); (b) experts are more able to improvise, probably because they have many automatic scripts available (Borko & Livingston, 1989) and because of this ability to improvise, avoid rigid plans (Tochon, 1990); (c) experts engage in more metacognitive behavior by monitoring and self-regulating their behavior (Berliner, 1986; Leinhardt & Greeno, 1986); and (d) that novices are constantly changing the patterns in how they teach, while experts have well practiced routines (Leinhardt, 1983; Leindardt & Smith, 1985). Brooks (1985) found that experts had more overlap in activities (doing several things at once for efficiency), exhibited a more business-like manner, and were faster to bring the class to order than novices. To the novice's credit, Griffey & Housner (1985) found that inexperienced teachers allowed more student initiated talk and had a greater use of student ideas. The researchers' findings also showed that novices wasted more time, allowed more off-task behavior, and were more critical of student behavior.

Purpose of the Study

Based on the need for a "rich picture" of how teachers start the year, particularly at the kindergarten level and the implications this description has for improving teacher training, the general purpose of this study was to identify and compare classroom management practices of experienced and novice kindergarten teachers at the beginning of the school year. The specific purpose was to describe the similarities and differences among five kindergarten (two novice and three experienced) teachers' thinking and behavior in the area of classroom management and organization during the first days of schooling and the first events of those days.

Method

Subjects

The participants were two novice teachers starting their second year of teaching and three experienced teachers with 15-20 years of teaching and their Masters in Education. All teachers taught two half-day kindergarten sessions with the number of students in each class ranging from 17-25. Experienced Teachers #1 and #2 (ET1 and ET2) taught in the same small Midwest college town. Their students were middle -to- lower class whites. Experienced Teacher #3 (ET3) taught in a suburban middle-class community with a 50/50 white/black student mix. Both Novice Teachers (NT4 and NT5) taught in a third district, NT4's class was urban and 100% lower-class black, and NT5's class was suburban middle to upper class white with the exception of two minority children (one Indian and one Japanese). ED1 & NT4 were videotaped in morning sessions, while the others were taped in the afternoon. Of the five teachers, only one had ever seen herself teaching on videotape (NT4).

The novice teachers were white middle class and in their early twenties. The experienced teachers were also white middle class, but 40-50 years of age. Unlike the novice teachers, the experienced teachers had children of their own.

Data Source

The qualitative study reported here is part of a larger investigation involving the five kindergarten teachers. During August and September, each teacher was videotaped four half-day sessions (two and

one-half to three hours long) beginning with the first day of school and once a week thereafter. Over 60 hours of videotape were collected as well as many pages of clinical observations by the researcher. Following the completion of each videotaping, the teachers viewed videotapes of themselves teaching and discussed with the author the rationale behind their instruction and behavior. These stimulated recalls (approximately 20 hours of interviews) were audiotaped and then transcribed for analysis. For this study, the data source was limited to the videotapes of the first hour to hour and a half of each day (total=23+ hours) as well as the complete audiotaped post-lesson reflections of each teacher and logs of anecdotal clinical observations.

Analysis

Analysis concentrated on the behaviors and the voices of experienced and inexperienced kindergarten teachers as they began the first days of school and the first instructional events of each day. Thus, the focus of this study was the analysis of opening events and transitions—known as unstable periods in the orchestration of classroom instruction.

Several methods of analysis were used to identify patterns of teacher interaction, behavior, and thinking during the opening events and within and between each event. First, through repeated viewing of the videotapes, a temporal pattern of time and events was established for each initial instructional period for each teacher (see Brooks, 1985; Frick, 1990). The number and length of events (elapsed time) and percentage of total class time for each activity was determined. Second, using the constant comparative technique (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Parker & Gehrke, 1986), 55 categories of teacher behavior and thinking were generated from the temporal patterns, repeated observation of the videotapes, analysis of the stimulated-recall audiotapes, and anecdotal clinical observation logs. These categories included both non-verbal and verbal behavior, personal behavior characteristics, stated beliefs and expectations, organization, control & discipline techniques, routinization, and others. Using the generated categories, individual case descriptions of each teacher's voices and actions were compiled followed by a cross-case analysis. Finally, data were integrated and refined and several patterns and hypotheses were developed addressing the similarities and differences between and across novice and experienced kindergarten teachers as they began the first month of school and the first part of a day's instruction. In addition, several

quantitative measures of teacher behavior during the first part of each day were taken including (a) general and specific praise rate, (b) number and type of rule statements, and (c) number and types of desists. (Results of these three measures will be reported in a later paper.).

Results and Conclusions

The voices and actions of the kindergarten teachers painted a rich canvas, telling a story of the complexities of teaching young children at the start of schooling. As patterns developed in the data, the author monitored the analyses, looking for what teachers "know" reflected through their behavior and words. Care was given not to force the data into preconceptions and to let the voices of the teachers and their actions paint the picture.

Eight hypotheses grounded in the data were developed. Each hypotheses first addresses similarities among the teachers and then any differences noted between novice and experienced groups. These eight statements are presented, not as perfect hypotheses, but as invitations for further study of management processes within the context of beginning kindergarten and expert-novice comparisons.

Management over Content

1. **At the beginning of kindergarten, content or subject specific knowledge is secondary to management concerns. Content is used to manage and teach appropriate school behavior, not necessarily to teach the subject. *This proposition is especially true for experienced teachers.***

Control and behavior management took priority over content during the first month of school. Both ET1 and NT5 echoed the position of all five teachers, "The main focus for the first few weeks," said ET1, "is getting them into routines...and knowing that I am in charge. I have to get that first....then I can get down to business (referring to teaching subject matter)." NT5 put behavior management at the top of what she wanted to accomplish during the first few weeks of school. "I don't do a lot of content," she stated "I want to get routines set. That's how I will have a good year. I'll add more content as I go."

Routinization

2. There seems to be a core of routines within common activity structures that kindergarten teachers regularly set. ***While both groups' actions and "voice" stressed setting these routines early, the experienced teachers' routines were more carefully thought out and articulated than were the novice teachers'. The experienced articulated more reasons for the routines.*** **Routine setting is very dynamic and open to change. Teachers are constantly about the business of refining their routines to make the class run smoothly.** ***However, the experienced teachers seemed more trapped in their routines and novice teachers seemed more physically energetic in these routines!***

Routines established at the beginning of each day by all the teachers involved the following activity structures: (a) entry into the classrooms; (b) business, including attendance, pledge, and calendar activities; (c) large group instruction; (d) seat work, and (e) choice time. Many of these events involved sitting for periods of time. Transitions between these events (and activities within the events) involved one common element--physical activity. This included a repertoire of songs, fingerplays, exercises, rhymes, and games. Teachers also used recorded songs--Hap Palmer was a favorite of them all. Both groups believed that because school involved a lot of sitting, children had to be taught to sit. However, teachers also had to "get them up and moving around (NT4), because "sit time can be deadly" (ET3).

An example of the rationale for and the wide variety of routines within an activity structure can be seen in the teachers' discussion and actions when the children first enter the classroom. A calm, quiet beginning of each day was of concern to all the teachers. As ET3 claimed, "entry is critical for having a calm day. Children can't be left to just bop around!" However, the teachers achieved this calmness in many different ways. ET1 sat at her desk by the door and greeted each child quietly as they came in, believing it was important to make them feel special and welcomed. Then she had the children do assigned work jobs at their seats and finally go to free choice at centers; NT4 gave the children a hug upon entry and then had them quietly read books at their desks; ET2 had free choice activities in the room; and ET3 placed her arm around each child and whispered a special message before they got their name tag and gathered in a circle on the rug. The fourth week she had them write on chalkboards as they waited for everyone to arrive. NT5 was the only teacher that didn't have the children immediately immersed in an

activity. She asked them to sit quietly until all the children arrived and then had a public conversation with each one as she took role.

Experienced teachers gave more reasons for establishing routines than the novices. Their rationales included making life easier for the teacher, giving children independence, fostering responsibility, preparing kindergartners to carry on without the help of the teacher, and establishing social order (lining up, taking turns, etc.).

Novice teachers were more flexible than experienced teachers in giving up routines that didn't work. For example, ET3 stressed the need to be flexible and to go with the children and their needs. However, she felt that once she started a routine she had to live with it. The other experienced teachers also indicated that they had routines that they didn't like, but they kept them anyway.

Overall, the novice teachers were more enthusiastic and lively as they progressed through the routines of the day. They rarely sat down and had more "fun" with the children. For instance, in transitions in which they used routines of exercises and songs, both novices would jump around, laugh and "act crazy with the children." This rarely happened with the more sedate experienced teachers!

Establishment of Rules

3. Establishment of a common group of rules is a critical part of the activities of the first month of school. ***The two groups introduced the same rules, but the novice teachers did so in more explicit and structured ways.***

All five teachers operated under the same corpus of rules for behavior whether explicit or implicit:. (a) when I talk, you listen; (b) raise hand to speak; (c) hands in lap and sit Indian style when on rug: (d) speak quietly; and (e) walk in the classroom. The first two rules seemed to be the most crucial, particularly for the novice teachers, who talked a lot about the importance of "using your eyes not your mouths when I'm talking (NT4)" and "being a real stinker about the raising-the-hand rule" (NT5). ET1 was the only teacher that did not make a big deal of hand raising to talk--although she required the rule to some extent. She seemed more comfortable with spontaneous talk and less structured interactions in large groups.

In addition to similar rules, there were similar patterns of behavior and talk about those rules. The teachers usually stated the reasons for these rules when they first introduced them. Both novice and

experienced teachers talked about wanting to be consistent with the rules and not wanting to be a policeman who constantly reminded the children about the rules--although this was in reality the case the first month of school in most of the classrooms. For all, there was the hope that within the ensuing days the children would soon remember the rules on their own. Indeed that happened, as there were significantly fewer rule reminders in the last week of taping (fourth week).

Though behavior rules were similar, the experienced and novice teachers viewed the teaching of those rules differently that first month. The experienced teachers did not list the rules anywhere in their room, whereas both novice teachers did—six for NT4 and four for NT5. The latter left space to add 2-3 more rules. Both teachers introduced the rule statements and discussed the lists many times. In each case, these rules were stated in the positive format, i.e "Walk in the classroom," instead of DON"T run. The three experienced teachers were more implicit in their approach to rules. They said that it was not appropriate to give too many rules at first. "You want a few ground rules about each thing...but, I try not to have too many rules. You want a room structured so there are not a lot of rules, but you have to have certain ones," said ET1. ET2 read a book to present proper behavior "without preaching." She used the story to make the children aware of the rules "without saying 'these are the rules we have to follow.' " ET3 was the farthest from the novice teacher in her thinking and behavior concerning rules. She operated on the premise that the first day should be as rule FREE as possible and that children should not be encumbered with do's and don'ts. She was reluctant to tell them all the rules, but instead, wanted them to draw on their own background and determine the rules for themselves.

Establishment of Control

4. Control is of critical importance—no less for experienced than inexperienced teachers. Fear of losing control and not gaining it back are issues no matter how much experience each teacher has. For the most part, the experienced teachers, as well as the novices, were able to anticipate and identify when they were losing control quickly and take steps to correct the situation. Interestingly, it was the experienced teachers who talked the most about control issues, although it was clear by the novice teachers' behavior in the classroom that it was a big issue for them, also.

"I believe in an iron hand," says ET1. "I could be criticized for being too firm, but I feel I need to establish that I have control immediately." Again her words echoed the other teachers when it came to control issues.

All the teachers were concerned with the results of loss of control. ET2 felt like she was constantly trying to bring her students back under control once she lost them. It made her feel terrible. "I feel at the time that it is probably worse than it actually is, " she stated. ET1 sighed that it seemed harder this year (as opposed to other years) to get them back. She felt she had most of the children, but there were still some on the fringes. It was a constant battle!

The teachers used a variety of methods to gain control, often regarded as "getting attention". ET1 used voice inflection and slow, quiet deliberate speech to draw the children back. She also used a small bell which she was careful not to overuse. NT5 found the best way to get control was to say, "give me your eyes," and then wait. The other three teachers quickly would change activities i.e. starting a little jingle or fingerplay to pull the students back. Often this technique came so naturally that the teachers weren't aware that they did it spontaneously when they sensed loss of control. ET2 &3 used a "lights out" technique to gain control similar to ET1's use of the bell.

Individual Behavior Problems

5. Individual behavior problems can consume the teacher's energy and time to the point that it is difficult to teach. The problems of individual children and how to deal with their inappropriate behavior weigh heavily on both beginning and experienced teachers; these problems change how the teacher feels about herself and even how she operated in the classroom with other children. ***A "Honeymoon Effect" with respect to individual behavior problems occur for all the teachers, but surprised the novice teachers more.***

Kindergartners who were discipline problems at first usually improved by the end of the month. For both sets of teachers, the fear of not being able to shape the children's behavior was evident. "For the first two days I thought I wasn't going to be able to handle him. He reminded me of a boy I had 3 years ago that I almost couldn't control," stated ET1. All the teachers talked about at least two children whom

they targeted as definite challenges at the beginning. They were very relieved that these students had really improved over the month's time.

ET2 as well as the other experienced teachers expected discipline problems after the relatively cooperative first few days. "Friday was the day," she said, " when all of a sudden kids just started blossoming. I thought, 'Oh boy, here we go!'" "I'm more relaxed in the beginning, but I've changed over the four weeks. I'm finding I now have to be on my toes because of the problems arising. Some of the ones who just sat back are now letting loose!."

This "honeymoon effect" was more of a surprise to the novice teachers. For instance, NT4 said that her aid had put a star beside the children she predicted would have problems that year. (The aid knew the children from preschool). At first NT4 didn't agree with the aid's predictions, but by the end of the month she found that the aid had been right on target. NT5 was delightfully surprised by the improved behavior of several of her boys and in disbelief at several of the girls who were not as attentive and cooperative by the fourth week of school.

The draining effect of difficult children was voiced by all the teachers. The most dramatic case was that of NT5. "I feel like a totally different person in the morning with my other class, " says NT5. "I don't feel calm and relaxed. I'm emotionally drained. It is so interesting for me to watch the difference (in myself between morning and afternoon groups) because of a few problem children."

Discipline Styles

6. Discipline styles do not necessarily relate to amount of experience. All teachers used a variety of effective approaches. *However, slight differences showed in that novice teachers seemed to rely more on "sermons" and rewards than the experienced ones.*

Although the five teachers varied in their discipline styles, there were some common threads. They all used certain inflections in their voices to indicate displeasure at behavior and "The Look" (which everyone told NT4, was essential for discipline). Removal/time-out, proximity, cueing, modeling, and quiet, private individual desists were other management techniques used by all five. Uniquely, ET3 used non-verbal hand signals to cue children and a direct confrontational style (i.e."Your behavior is bad, but

you are not bad.") as a second level after other indirect methods had not worked; NT4 used assertive management with smiley and sad faces on the board; and ET1 used a more non-confrontational style in which she deliberately tried not to encourage a defensive reaction or power struggle scenario. She often relied on the strategies of giving choices to the problem child (as did ET3) or reverse psychology.

Two differences between the groups showed in the data:

(1) the novice teachers differed from experienced teachers in their use of rewards. NT4 used coupons, gum balls and stickers as reinforcers while NT5 used candy. There were no tangible rewards given in any of the experienced teachers' classrooms; and

(2) the novices reminded and talked about correct behavior to disruptive children more often. Phrases like "How many times do I have to remind you?" and "When will you ever learn?" weren't heard in the experienced teachers' classrooms.

First Day

7. First days have a different tone and pace than those later on in the month for both inexperienced and experienced teachers. ***While teachers use varied means to set the stage for success the first day, experienced teachers had more.***

The tone of the day can best be described by these quotes from two experienced teachers:

> "I was more comfortable (once I got through the first day) because the first day of school scares me to death. It will until I'm 80" (ET1)!

> "There were some scared little bodies that walked in here today" (ET2)!

Because the children (and the teachers) were nervous, the pace and tone of the first day was noticeably different from the rest of the month. ET2 said she tried to stay very low key and not overly motivating because the children came in excited, scared and hyper the first day. The other teachers referred to the deliberate slow pace of the first day. "I go slow!" was underscored by all.

Both groups explicitly did a number of things to help the children feel successful and not threatened in their first experience at school. Hugs, praise, care not to put children on the spot or throw too much at them were some of the strategies seen or voiced that first day.

However, experienced teachers set up their first days in three strikingly different ways than the novice teachers. First, all the teachers met with their children before the first day. ET3 purposely taught her children some rhymes and songs in individual conferences the week before school started. ET's 1 & 2 invited parents and children into their classrooms the night before school started. The idea was to allow the children to get to know the teacher and the room, grow accustomed to the teacher's voice and understand where they would be coming on the first day. Secondly, the experienced teachers only met with half of their students the first day. The other half came on the second day and the whole class came on the third day. Finally, two of the three experienced teachers stated that they were careful to not distract the children with too much when they entered the classroom. ET1 said that she did not put too many free choice activities out, while ET3 had the philosophy that "the room should grow with the children." Her bulletin boards and shelves were empty, but ready to be purposely filled when the proper time came.

Half-Day

8. A unique feature about half-day kindergarten is the opportunity to learn from the morning activities and improve and fine tune the afternoon instruction--almost like a dress rehearsal. For that and other reasons, morning kindergarten is often more difficult for both experienced and inexperienced teachers.

All teachers in the study felt that they improved their management of time and students the second half of the day. The novice teachers were more acutely aware of the differences between groups than the experienced teachers who tended to expect those differences.

In all cases, the teachers frequently referred to and compared their afternoon and morning sessions--and in all cases the afternoons were easier. NT4 said she was exhausted by lunch; NT5 said she was a totally different person in the afternoon; ET1 said the afternoon were never as hectic as the mornings; and ET2 said she got a lot more learning and teaching done in the afternoon, possibly because she was more relaxed.

Summary and Conclusions

Thus, in the "beginning of the beginning" kindergarten teachers put behavior management over content; set up common routines, activity structures, rules, and control measures; were emotionally taxed when faced with problem students and the "honeymoon effect;" used a variety of effective discipline styles; set a different tone and pace for the first day; and experienced easier classroom management in the afternoon sessions than in the morning ones.

When comparing novice and experienced teachers' classroom management practices, two conclusions became clear: (a) experience does not necessarily equal expertise, and (b) inexperience does not necessarily equal ineptitude.

Obviously, novice teachers have much to learn from experienced teachers. In this study, the latter group seemed to understand the 'why's" of what they did, used more implicit rule setting and discipline styles, and more varied techniques for first day success.

So too, can experienced teachers learn from novices. These teachers bring fresh, new ideas to the classroom. They bring energy and excitement. They are more physically active. They are not trapped in routines that are ineffective. They use rewards productively. Their spontaneity allows them to be flexible and creative.

Perhaps the overwhelming conclusion in this study was that the two groups had more in common than different when it came to managing a classroom. The voices and actions of the teachers made three things repeatedly clear:

(1) Teaching children how to act in a kindergarten classroom is demanding--possibly more so than in any other grade or profession;

> i.e.: "Other teachers don't realize how hard kindergarten is. I'd die for a 20 minute study period like I've seen the 6th grade teacher assign" (NT4)!
>
> have! (NT4)."

> i.e.: "How do you do face that? How can you get up in the mornings?" (Comments of ET2's husband when watching her videotape.)

(2) Kindergarten universally involves a lone woman teaching in an isolated and crowded room;

i.e.: "I've taught for over 20 years, and haven't observed that many kindergarten--teachers to compare my management and teaching style" (ET3).

i.e: "Could we see each other's videotapes and the tapes of the novice teachers?" asked ETs 1 &2 of the other. "We've never watched each other teach even though our rooms are beside each other. Plus, we think we'd learn from what those NEW teachers do;" and

(3) No matter how much experience and knowledge a teacher has, she never stops learning how to refine and improve management strategies;

i.e.: "I try new things. May drive me crazy the entire year, but that's the way I learn. I just throw new ideas out and see what happens" (NT5).

i.e.: "I'm learning to get better at what I want to accomplish. I've grown because I've been able to adapt my directions and patterns to fit what I want them to do "(ET2).

i.e.: "Every time you start something new, you have to get your feet wet. You make mistakes. You have to constantly re-evaluate what you are doing. It is not that you ever know all the answers--you don't. You are learning right along with the children" (ET3).

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